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ANWAR EL SADAT AND THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE:
A LOOK AT THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

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ANWAR EL SADAT AND THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE:
A LOOK AT THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you just might find –
You get what you need.

Rolling Stones

In September of 1970, Anwar el Sadat found himself in a precarious position as he assumed

the presidency of Egypt. In the 1967 War, the Israelis successfully executed a preemptive attack

that defeated the Egyptian army and seized large parts of the Sinai and the Suez Canal, greatly

humiliating the Egyptians. The Egyptian people expected solutions, and many among the military

and public were critical of Sadat's leadership. With his country on the verge of bankruptcy, Sadat

had to find a way out of the 'no-peace, no-war' stalemate that had trapped his country since the end

of the 1967 War. By the summer of 1972, despite his best efforts, time was running out. Sadat

knew that he would be ousted unless he could find solutions. In response, Sadat developed a

comprehensive, coherent strategy that skillfully employed all the elements of statecraft to create a

favorable international environment that would resolve his difficulties and secure his political

power.

SITUATION AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

Sadat's primary political objective was to secure his power base by regaining lost territory

and restoring Arab pride. Sadat faced five seemingly unsolvable problems in achieving this

objective. Tightly interwoven, these problems could only be solved through a comprehensive and

coherent strategy. The first problem Sadat faced was declining credibility. Sadat frequently alluded

to talk of war to placate his people, to influence the international community, and to pressure Israel

into the peaceful return of occupied territories.   His words were wearing thin by the summer of

1972. Signs of eroding domestic support included an attempted a *coup* in 1971, riots in January

1972, and an increasing requirement to censor Egyptian media. Sadat's lack of credibility was undermining his ability to negotiate a settlement. After years of hearing threats of war, Israelis felt confident in their military superiority and grew skeptical of Sadat's repetitive threats.

A second crucial problem was that Egypt was militarily unprepared to fight. After a series of meetings with his military leadership in March 1971, Sadat discovered that his troops were neither equipped nor trained for a war with Israel. Sadat's subsequent criticism of the military resulted in a military faction, led by Ali Sabry, to attempt a *coup* in April that was backed by the Soviet Union. Sadat wisely used this incident as grounds to solidify the military under his direction. The attempted *coup* and Egypt's lack of military preparedness further undermined his credibility with both the United States and the Soviet Union.[1] Additionally, while the United States was providing substantial domestic and military aid to Israel, the Soviet Union was providing less support to Egypt, consisting primarily of defensive weapons.[2] Sadat had to find a way either to change this trend or to alter the balance of power in the region. To achieve his primary objective and improve his credibility, Sadat sought, as an interim objective, ways to improve his war fighting capability.

Third, the Egyptian economy was on the verge of collapse. Absent a peace treaty following the 1967 War, Egypt felt obligated to maintain a large military force. Egyptian citizens had rising expectations for quality of life that Sadat would be unable to address as long as he had to maintain a combat ready military. Military equipment increases were only possible by additional foreign loans, but past loans already burdened the Egyptian economy.[3] While Egypt looked to the Soviet Union for help, the Soviets were more focused on their own interests. Sadat also felt that loans

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[1] The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, "Sadat Decides on War," Chapter 3 in **The Yom Kippur War** (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1974), 51.
[2] Ibid., 46.
[3] Ibid., 58.

from Saudi Arabia were becoming harder to justify. Therefore, Sadat developed a long-term objective of reducing the economic burden of maintaining a large standing military force so that he could pursue pressing domestic issues and economic growth with adequate financial resources.

Fourth, Egypt was unable to gather sufficient international support and was at a diplomatic stalemate. With declining credibility and an unprepared military, Sadat lacked the leverage necessary to peacefully achieve his primary political objective. He realized that only the United States, as Israel's primary ally and benefactor, had the influence to pressure Israel into a negotiated settlement. Israel was unwilling to negotiate with Egypt in a substantive dialogue. As Moshe Dayan stated, "To try to achieve a formal peace would perhaps be detrimental to the situation we are trying to preserve, which is to consolidate the status quo resulting from the war and to transform it into an unofficial peace."[4] The United States and Israel viewed Egypt as a weak Soviet puppet state and expected Egypt to make significant concessions in diplomatic efforts conducted in 1970 and 1971.[5] To restore Arab pride, Egypt had to regain all of its lost territory – concessions were unacceptable. Another reason for deadlock was that most proposals made by the Egyptians referenced the Palestinian people. Sadat felt obligated to include this issue because of strong Arab sentiment. To do otherwise risked strong public dissent and loss of Arab financial support. Israel, however, saw this issue as a significant threat and was unwilling to negotiate.[6] While continuing to seek a diplomatic solution, Sadat sought to shape international support for a possible Egyptian war effort that might be necessary to break the diplomatic stalemate.

Finally, a fifth major problem was that Israel firmly believed the territory seized in the 1967 War had enhanced its security. With each passing day, Israel became more entrenched in keeping this territory as a buffer. Israel, confident in its military superiority and its ability to mobilize,

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[4] Mohammed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy, *The October War* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993), 184.
[5] Su*nday Times*, 46.

doubted Arab earnestness in seeking a lasting peace.[7] Unwilling to return to pre-1967 borders,

Israel believed captured land provided additional time for mobilization. Sadat, observing Israeli

settlement patterns in the occupied territories, realized that Israel had no intention of returning all

occupied Egyptian territory.[8] Consequently, Sadat felt if war were necessary, he would have to

"shatter the Israeli 'theory of security.'"[9]

Time was working against Sadat. Domestic support and the economy were growing weaker

while Israel was becoming more securely established in the occupied territories. With his military

unprepared and his economy strained, Sadat would have to skillfully use all the elements of

statecraft and exploit available opportunities to achieve all his objectives.

ANALYSIS OF STATECRAFT

Sadat simultaneously pursued a dual national strategy that would attempt to achieve his

objectives peacefully while setting the stage to achieve them through war, if necessary. Sadat was

willing to give diplomacy a chance.[10] As Israel was militarily strong, Sadat had to optimize his own

military's capabilities. Even this would be insufficient means to achieve his desired ends; he had to

gain supportive allies. The first element of statecraft that Sadat would effectively use was

diplomacy.

Diplomacy

Sadat sought to use his influence with the Soviet Union to gain the military equipment

necessary for war and to indirectly pressure Israel through the United States into a negotiated

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[6] Ibid., 47.
[7] *Sunday Times*, 47.
[8] O'Neill, 29-30.
[9] Anwar Sadat, **In Search of Identity** (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 254.
[10] *Sunday Times*, 49.

settlement. The Soviet Union, recognizing the strategic importance of Egypt's geographic location, saw Egypt as a means of expanding influence in the Middle East. The Soviets also wanted to sell arms for hard currency. What the Soviets did not want was war in the region. A higher interest for the Soviet Union was to stabilize its relationship with the United States because the arms race was straining the Soviet economy. Because of these interests and concern over Sadat's rhetoric, the Soviets delayed arms shipments to Egypt and refused to give Sadat offensive weapons. Sadat determined that the Soviets were unwilling to risk a security relationship with the United States over Egypt's desire to reacquire its occupied territory, and therefore Sadat would not receive significant Soviet support.[11]

Sadat took advantage of the Soviet Union's desire to maintain presence in the Middle East to compel the Soviets into recognizing Egypt's right to reacquire its occupied territories by means other than diplomacy.[12]   In doing so, Sadat planned on the Soviet's low regard for Egyptian war fighting capability to offset Soviet desire to maintain stability in the Middle East. He calculated that this same rationale could be used to obtain additional arms. After several meetings with the Soviets, Sadat pressured the Soviets into promises of additional arms. The Soviet Union, however, delayed delivery of these arms and, in July 1972, told Sadat to relax his military posture. Dissatisfied, Sadat expelled all Soviet military advisors from Egypt. This decision had a number of benefits. It unified support for Sadat among Egyptian military leaders who had been unhappy with what they perceived as arrogant Soviet advisors. The decision gave the Soviets "a wakeup call" that they had to address Egyptian interests to keep presence in Egypt. The expulsion also led the Israelis to believe that Egypt was unable to pursue a military solution. Finally, the decision offered an

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[11] Bard E. O'Neill, "The October War: A Political-Military Assessment," *Air University Review*, 25, (July-August 1974), 30-31.
[12] *Sunday Times*, 55-56.

opportunity for the United States to step in, provided that they were willing to broker a settlement acceptable to Egypt.[13]

Sadat believed that the United States was key in achieving a diplomatic solution. He harbored hopes of exerting influence on the United States through the Soviet Union, but realized that the Jewish vote and influence played a powerful role in determining American foreign policy. As Sadat saw it, the November 1972 U. S. presidential election was the last opportunity for a pro-Arab shift in American foreign policy.[14] While he would continue to explore the intentions of the United States throughout, Sadat felt if the United States failed to shift its policy, he would have to execute his military option. In the spring of 1973, the Soviet Union and the United States officially endorsed détente. Sadat saw his opportunities for a peaceful solution dying. He realized that détente made a diplomatic solution even less likely because neither superpower wanted to risk détente over their divergent, less vital interests in the Middle East.[15] Sadat also recognized an opportunity. If he were to start a limited war, he felt certain that the superpowers would immediately intervene.

It became apparent to Sadat that peaceful initiatives had a remote chance of yielding his primary objective because it was in neither of the superpowers' perceived interests. Sadat decided that military force would be necessary. Therefore he began courting the now expelled Soviets. He did so by extending Soviet use of Egyptian maritime facilities as a good will gesture.[16] The Soviets readily responded in early 1973 by providing additional military equipment that included some of the offensive weapons Sadat sought. The Soviets did so to regain presence and to deny the United States the opportunity of gaining influence with Egypt.[17] As predicted, the Soviets rationalized that

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[13] Sunday Times, 58-59.
[14] Sadat, 229.
[15] O'Neill, 30.
[16] Sadat, 237-238.
[17] Sunday Times, 59-60.

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even with additional arms and despite his rhetoric, Sadat had insufficient means to go to war with Israel. Egypt's preparations for war, however, were already underway.

With the purpose of increasing military and economic support, Sadat worked to strengthen relationships among Arab countries and made good use of his many friendships with Arab rulers. Playing on religious and cultural ties, he rallied the Arabs together.[18] He had to chance a break away from Libya because Muammar al-Qaddafi opposed Jordan's King Hussein and Saudi's King Faisal. Nonetheless, Egypt was far better off having the support and financial aid of the oil rich Arab countries.[19] Uniting Arab support helped maintain domestic support and enhanced Sadat's credibility with his people. In April 1973, Sadat secured the military support of Syria. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad pledged to attack with Egypt because he had interests closely aligned with Sadat. Sadat would meet two more times with Assad to coordinate military operations and set a date for the attack.[20] A Syrian attack, if launched in coordination with an Egyptian attack, would split Israeli efforts, increasing the chances of Arab success. Sadat had used diplomacy to alter the balance of power, but he knew that he could count on Arab unity for only a short time and would accordingly have to act quickly.

Sadat seized the moral high ground, subsequently isolating Israel and gaining international backing, through additional diplomatic efforts he initiated. Sadat attended the Organization of African Unity in May 1973 and pushed through a resolution condemning Israel for its aggression. In the summer of 1973, Egypt pushed for a resolution on the Middle East issue before the Security Council. The United States effectively vetoed the resolution, but the remaining 14 members of the Council endorsed it.[21] Egypt also successfully obtained the backing of most non-aligned countries

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[18] Sadat, 238-239.
[19] O'Neill, 31.
[20] Sadat, 241-242.
[21] Sadat, 239-240.

throughout the world. At the Non-Aligned Summit Conference held in September 1973, Egypt won support of its goal to reacquire the occupied territory.[22] Prior to going to war, Sadat would have the support of more than 100 countries.[23] While these efforts did little to produce a negotiated settlement, they did help shape the environment for a possible post-war settlement and would, albeit unintentionally, effect Israel's decision-making when war came.

Economic Influence

Although Sadat used the debts he owed for arms to gain concessions from the Soviets, Egypt produced few exports and seemingly had little ability to exert economic influence. Egypt was unable to collect canal tolls and had few sources of revenue, possessing no substantial resources to exploit. Nonetheless, Sadat set the stage for exerting two powerful influences on Western economies. The Arab states had threatened many times before to cut oil supplies in an attempt to soften the pro-Israel stance of the United States, but had doubts that this action would be effective. But having united the Arabs, Sadat had the coercive potential to make an oil embargo work. Moreover, if Sadat could seize control of the Suez Canal through war, he could offer the economic incentive of allowing commercial shipping the use of the canal. Sadat would use these economic influences to help ensure a successful post-war settlement.

Information Influence

Sadat used information influence to effectively maintain domestic support and to deceive and isolate the Israelis. Telling his people in 1972 that a "battle of destiny" would have to be waged against Israel, Sadat continued to talk of war not only to appease those in his population, but also to hold the support of hawks in the military.[24] Sadat's visible war preparations improved his credibility at home. Moreover, his diplomatic efforts to win international backing also generated

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[22] O'Neill, 31.
[23] Sadat, 240.

media attention that was generally favorable to Egypt and helped isolate Israel around the world. In May and August 1973, Sadat used mass media as part of his military deception plan and helped convince the Israelis to make costly mobilizations.[25] Sadat's constant war rhetoric, however, soon became empty threats to the Israelis. In other words, Sadat used his lack of international credibility as part of a deception plan. Throughout, Sadat controlled much of his media by dismissing or jailing journalists who were unsupportive of his policy. Just prior to going to war, Sadat granted amnesty to all jailed journalists and other political prisoners. He did so to convince the left and indirectly, though more importantly, Israel that he had to reconcile in Egypt because he was incapable of fighting.[26] Sadat knew that the superpowers and Israel would judge this as rational because they had a low regard for Egypt's military abilities. Further attempting to deceive Israel, he informed a European foreign minister that he was going to the United Nations in October, calculating that Israel would learn of this and would assume that Egypt was unlikely to attack then.[27] Because of Sadat's use of information, Israel and the superpowers were taken completely off-guard when Egypt attacked.

<u>Military Preparation and Influence</u>

Sadat wanted his military prepared by November 1972 to go to war. He elected to use military force because he had insufficient non-military influence to obtain terms that were domestically acceptable. Surprisingly Sadat had made the same mistake that he made prior to his review of the military in March 1971 – he failed to actively interact and plan with his military leadership. Attending a meeting to review military plans on October 28, 1972, Sadat discovered once again that his armed forces were totally unprepared to fight. Sadat subsequently appointed a

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[24] O'Neill, 27.
[25] Sadat, 241.
[26] Ibid., 245.
[27] Ibid., 244.

new minister of war, Marshal Ahmed Ismail Ali. He directed Ismail to develop first a defensive plan and then a plan for an offensive attack.[28] Sadat would not make the same mistake a third time. While Ismail proved an effective leader, Sadat worked closely with him to develop a military strategy that supported and was aligned with Sadat's national strategy. Sadat would wait for his military to become fully prepared before he attacked. While he waited, however, the earnest efforts of his military improvements helped maintain Sadat's domestic support.

Through diplomacy, Sadat achieved his objective of improving his war fighting capability by gaining additional Soviet military equipment and a strong ally. He still lacked, however, sufficient war fighting capability to ensure success. Sadat realized he would have to make use of surprise and deception to defeat the Israelis. Tied to his media efforts, Sadat twice mobilized his military in order to provoke a similar reaction from the Israelis. In mobilizing, the Israelis incurred an enormous cost.[29]

In deciding to use military force, Sadat believed that he could move past the stalemate he faced if his military could seize and hold part of the Sinai territory. This would remove the humiliation of the 1967 War and might alter the settlement calculus, thereby making a post-war diplomatic solution possible. Such a solution would keep Sadat in power and set the stage to reduce Egypt's economic burdens. He told his planners, "He who wins the first twenty-four-hour encounter will surely win the entire war."[30] Sadat felt that the superpowers would not step in to save Egypt. Therefore, Egypt had to succeed initially if the war was to end as Sadat envisioned – on this everything hinged.

Sadat had insufficient influence to achieve a solely diplomatic solution that would satisfy domestic demands. He used diplomacy as a tool to increase his ability to wage war, to unite the

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[28] Sadat, 229, 234-237.
[29] Ibid., 244.

Arabs, and to gain international support. Sadat effectively maintained domestic support and eventually ensured that his military was prepared to fight. He also rationally used information influence and military actions to deceive the Israelis. By deciding on war, Sadat employed the only means remaining to achieve his primary political objective. Sadat effectively used the instruments of statecraft to improve his chances of success and set the stage for a favorable termination, but ultimate success depended on the soundness of his military strategy.

ANALYSIS OF MILITARY STRATEGY

Sadat and his military planners knew that without sufficient offensive weapons from the Soviets they could only fight a limited war, one that would produce an acceptable negotiated settlement. The war was to have limited military objectives, but would require the majority of Egypt's military resources to achieve those objectives. War termination and well-reasoned political objectives were an integral part of Egypt's military strategy.

Military planners required a military strategy that would compel the Soviet Union and United States to find a diplomatic solution, one that ensured Israel returned the occupied territories to Egypt. The Soviet Union and the United States had different objectives in the Middle East; however, Sadat reasoned that a higher objective for the superpowers was to avoid war with each other. If the Egyptians and Syrians could inflict heavy personnel losses and expense on Israel, Israel might be forced to reconsider its current assumption that additional territory provided additional security. Finally, with Israel diplomatically isolated, the Arabs could potentially withhold oil and control passage of commercial shipping through the Suez Canal to exert influence

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[30] Ibid., 244.

on industrial countries, particularly the United States, to pressure Israel into a negotiated settlement in favor of Egypt and other Arab countries.[31]

Ismail stated his strategic goal: "To challenge the Israeli theory of 'security' according to the capabilities of our armed forces, with the purpose of inflicting the greatest losses possible, to persuade the enemy that a continued occupation of our land would be more costly than it can afford… and to demonstrate that a security based on psychological, political, and military intimidation is precarious and will not provide protection whether now or in the future."[32] Clearly, the objective was to break the diplomatic stalemate so as to set the stage for a negotiated settlement that would achieve Sadat's primary objective.

Strategic Concept

Ismail and his military planners intended to dictate the nature of the war they were about to embark upon and were careful to set realistic military objectives that would achieve the political objective. The military strategic concept was for Egypt and Syria to use surprise and mass to defeat Israeli perimeter defenses and seize terrain covered by an anti-air umbrella before Israel could mobilize. Syria and Egypt would execute separate attacks, but by attacking at the same time, they hoped to weaken the Israelis ability to respond. The Syrian objective was to regain the Golan Heights, also lost during the 1967 War. Egypt, upon achieving its initial objectives, would then use its defensive weapons and the inherent advantages of the defense to blunt Israeli counter offensives. Specifically, the Egyptians wanted "… to deliver a carefully planned assault across the Suez Canal, capture the Bar Lev Line, and establish five bridgeheads of ten to fifteen kilometers depth each on the eastern bank of the canal. The attacking troops were to inflict the heaviest possible losses upon the enemy's counterblows, as well as to stand in readiness for further assignments that might be

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[31] O'Neill, 32.
[32] El-Gamsay, 189.

assigned later on."[33] Heliborne rangers were to be used to destroy Bar Lev strong points.[34] This

offensive-defensive strategy depended on initial Egyptian success and on the Israelis counter-

attacking where the Egyptians expected. Nonetheless, the limited objectives of this strategy were

within the Egyptian means to achieve.

Assumptions

The Egyptian military planners had to make a number of prudent assumptions in order to

optimize their capabilities. First, they assumed that their deception would work. Second, they

assumed that, once mobilized, Israel would react by immediately counterattacking Egyptian

positions. Third, the Egyptians assumed that their anti-tank and anti-air weapons would be

effective. They had good reason to believe this as they selected their best as crews and trained them

extensively. Fourth, they assumed that the Syrians would attack as planned and would achieve

surprise. To ensure coordination, Ismail reviewed and approved all plans as overall commander of

Arab forces.[35] And fifth, Sadat thought he would be initially successful and therefore could end the

war at a time of his choosing. If any of these assumptions were to prove false, the Egyptian strategy

would be seriously jeopardized.

Capabilities and Vulnerabilities

In developing their strategy, Ismail and his military planners sought to use Egyptian

strengths to exploit Israeli weaknesses and counter Israeli strengths. Ismail assessed Egypt's ability

to fight in the defense (particularly armed with anti-tank weapons), and ability to cover his army

with anti-air artillery and missiles as significant advantages. He also assessed Egyptian mass and

ability to sustain casualties as advantages. He calculated the Israelis advantages as air superiority

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[33] Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub and Mohammed Dia El Din Zohdy, "Decision and Concept." *The Ramadan War* (Dunn Loring, VA: T. N. Dupy Associates, Inc., 1978), 18.
[34] Badri, et al., 23.
[35] Major General A. H. Farrar-Hockley, "The October War," Chapter 2 in the *Arab-Israeli War, October 1973: Background and Events*, Adelphi Paper #111, (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies IISS, Winter 1974-74), 16.

and aid from the United States, which could reinforce Israel and, possibly, provide military intelligence. Furthermore, he recognized Israel's ability to conduct fast-striking tank operations in depth, the use of interior lines, a defensive position behind a formidable obstacle, and rapid mobilization as other Israeli advantages.[36] Ismail correctly saw Israeli overconfidence and underestimation of Arab military strength as significant strategic vulnerabilities. He knew he could capitalize on these as Israel over-extended her defenses and had long lines of communication. He knew too that the Israeli population was extremely sensitive to casualties. Strategic surprise and maximizing enemy casualties were the ways that Ismail would choose to exploit Israeli vulnerabilities.[37]

Egyptian vulnerabilities included limited offensive capability, limited mobility, and need to cross the Suez Canal. Ismail's strategic concept carefully considered these vulnerabilities. He would select objectives that kept his forces protected from Israeli strike aircraft. He would also use his mass by disbursing it along a 305-kilometer front to compel the Israelis to disperse their efforts, hopefully to further neutralize Israeli strengths of air superiority and fast striking tank operations. His defense positions had to be mutually supporting to prevent gaps that the Israelis could possibly exploit. He depended on his mass in the initial offensive to overwhelm the proportionally smaller front-line defenses. Furthermore, Egypt developed innovative tactics to exploit the capabilities of its defensive weapons in offensive operations. Ismail, however, failed to consider other Egyptian vulnerabilities. One was Egypt's inability to improvise once their plans were upset.[38] The Israelis would later capitalize on Ismail's failure to organize a centralized mobile reserve force that could

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[36] Badri, et al,. 19, 23.
[37] Ibid., 22-23.
[38] Peter Allen, *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), 115-116.

have countered an unexpected Israeli success. A second vulnerability was the Egyptians limited logistics capability compared to that of the Israelis.

The center of gravity that Ismail sought to attack was the Israeli Army. He wanted to inflict maximum attrition, and to do this he would take advantage of Israel's propensity to attack and their underestimation of Egypt's fighting ability. Israeli strike aircraft were another center of gravity that Ismail would counter with anti-air weapons. The center of gravity he needed to protect was his attacking army. Sadat believed that Egypt could terminate the war at will, as long as Egypt was initially successful. If the Egyptian armies appeared threatened, Egypt would appeal for a cease-fire.

Risks

The Egyptian strategic concept had risks that planners attempted to minimize. The first risk was that Egypt had to achieve initial success to gain its political objective. This entailed crossing a large obstacle, the Suez Canal, overwhelming the perimeter defenses, and establishing sound defensive positions before the Israelis could effectively react. By choosing a Jewish holy day and effectively orchestrating a sound deception plan, Egypt hoped to catch the Israelis unprepared. The Egyptians attempted to eliminate internal friction and increase the speed of execution by conducting detailed training where each unit rehearsed the role it would play. To further delay an Israeli response, Ismail decided to start the war the same way that the Israelis started the 1967 War, making a large-scale air strike to hit critical command and control sites and other essential targets. Additionally, Egypt would use massive pre-emptive artillery barrages to hinder Israeli operational mobility and to neutralize forward-base Israeli firepower.

A second risk was that Egypt had to ensure that its attack was closely timed with the Syrians; otherwise, the Israelis would have an easier defensive problem and would be better

prepared to meet a late attacking adversary. Military planners from Egypt and Syria worked closely together and established a communication link to ensure coordination. Egyptian planners, however, missed other risks. By planning to eventually put the majority of their armor on the East Bank, the Egyptians placed a natural obstacle at their backs. If the Israelis were able to get a sizable force across the Suez Canal, the Egyptians would have a difficult time in defending their lines of communication. The Egyptians also failed to consider what they would do if the Syrians were defeated.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

The Egyptians achieved the initial military success that Sadat sought. They surprised the Israelis by the speed and size of the Egyptian attack. The Egyptians also surprised the Israelis with the timing of the attack. Guilty of mirror imaging, the Israelis thought the Egyptians would attack, if they attacked, in the morning, not in the afternoon with the sun at their backs. The Israelis, having concluded that Egypt was massed to attack on the morning of October 6, had an opportunity to conduct a pre-emptive air strike. Israel elected against such a strike because of the international pressure that Sadat had previously mustered against Israel. Both the date that Sadat chose to attack and the initial Egyptian air strike greatly slowed Israeli mobilization. Yom Kippur was the only day of the year that all Israeli television and radio stations completely shut down – Egypt planned on that. The Israelis normally relied on these media to recall their reserve soldiers, but were initially unable to do so.[39]

At 2:00 P.M. on October 6, a coordinated attack of artillery and 220 Egyptian aircraft dealt devastating blows to Israeli defenses. Only 260 Israeli solders manned front-line positions against 40,000 well-prepared Egyptian soldiers. In less than six hours, more than 80,000 Egyptians crossed

<div align="center">16</div>

to the East Bank of the canal. Reacting as predicted, the Israelis made uncoordinated counterattacks that Egypt's anti-air and anti-tank weapons proved effective in blunting. The Israelis were forced to abandon the Bar Lev line and assume defensive positions further to the northeast. Unable to flank the Egyptians and unwilling to conduct a frontal assault, Israel elected to hold the Egyptians and concentrate on the Syrians. Sadat's early success rallied additional support. All the eastern European capitals, as well as most of the African and Asian capitals, condemned Israel despite Sadat's declaration that Egypt launched a surprise attack.[40] Iraq and Jordon would commit military forces while the Soviets, Algeria, and Yugoslavia would ship tanks and equipment.[41] The Egyptians became confident with their early success, perhaps over-confident.

Sadat decided to deviate from his military strategy when Israel stopped the Syrian attack and appeared to be threatening Damascus. Unlike the 1967 War, technology had given the defense greater superiority. Despite the Soviets strong desire to implement a cease-fire, Sadat elected instead to attack prepared Israeli positions to relieve pressure on the Syrians.[42] This decision was a mistake that nearly cost Sadat his objectives. Soundly repulsed after a poorly coordinated attack, the Egyptians returned to their defensive positions and the protection of their fixed anti-air umbrella. Israel subsequently found and exploited a small gap between the two Egyptian armies to conduct a hotly contested canal crossing that eventually placed a large armor force on the West Bank. Unfortunately, the Egyptians' military strategy lacked flexibility. On the West Bank, Egyptian forces were dispersed and ill prepared to check the Israelis. Clausewitz's dynamics of fog, friction, and chance all influenced the outcome of the Yom Kippur War. The Egyptians, not having a concentrated mobile reserve, were slow to comprehend the nature and threat posed by the Israeli

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[39] Allen, 46-57.
[40] Allen, 126-127.
[41] Ibid., 124.
[42] Allen, 179-180.

counter-thrust and consequently responded in a piecemeal, uncoordinated manner. But despite the military consequences that would ensue, the comprehensive quality of Sadat's statecraft helped ensured a favorable outcome.

Sadat's diplomacy played an essential role in war termination. He miscalculated, however, how long it would take to implement the cease-fire because independent-minded Israelis refused to bow to international pressure. On October 22, six day's after Sadat asked for a cease-fire, the United Nations passed a Security Council Resolution 338 that called for an immediate cease-fire and a negotiated peace. Fighting continued with the Egyptian Third Army nearly encircled by the Israelis. When the Israelis ignored yet another cease-fire on October 24, Sadat responded by inviting both the superpowers to send in forces to enforce the cease-fire. Soviet threats of military intervention and the United States concern of the possibility of the Soviets entering the war led the United States to put intense diplomatic pressure on Israel just as he planned. Israel finally agreed to a cease-fire on October 28. Doubting each other's intentions, the superpowers came to the brink of world war. Ultimately, Sadat's assessment that the primary interest of the superpowers lay in détente proved correct. As a result of the Yom Kippur War, the United States and the Soviet Union came to understand that it was in their best interest to achieve peace in the Middle East that was satisfactory to Egypt and were subsequently moved to action. Sadat readily agreed to negotiate with the Americans, abandoning his relationship with the Soviets, because he realized that only the United States had the influence to achieve the terms he sought.[43]

Because of the United Nations cease-fire and Sadat's refusal to withdraw, Egypt still held the territory on the East Bank when the war ended. In the eyes of the Egyptians, they had won a military victory, restoring Arab honor and discrediting the Israeli security assumptions. This in turn gave Sadat flexibility in negotiating the return of occupied territory and in brokering a favorable

peace settlement. His people and the world no longer viewed him as a "defeated supplicant."[44]

Arab unity resulted in an oil embargo starting October 17 that increased oil prices from three to

twelve dollars per barrel and gas prices in the United States by over 200 percent. The effects were

felt not only in the United States (an ever-increasing inflation rate which by late 1974 had reached

the most severe levels since World War II), but in Europe and Japan as well (creating mounting

unemployment coupled with the threat of a devastating world food crisis). The stage had been set,

domestically and internationally, to compel the United States to achieve peace in the Middle East.

After receiving assurances from Kissinger that the United States would work for implementation of

Resolutions 242 and 338, Sadat promised to encourage the Arab oil-producing states to lift their

boycott on sales of petroleum to the United States.[45] The embargo was finally lifted in March

1974.[46]

SUMMARY

Sadat created a favorable international environment and greatly improved his probability of

success by orchestrating a comprehensive, coherent strategy to achieve his objectives. In setting the

stage for war, he improved his country's war fighting capability, gained international support, and

set achievable military objectives that would obtain his goals. He continued to seek a peaceful

resolution throughout. In attacking Israel, Sadat improved his credibility and seriously challenged

the Israeli assumption that land provided security. Although the Israelis were able to eventually

counter Egyptian gains, Sadat accomplished the initial success necessary to break the diplomatic

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[43] Sadat, 266, 291-293.
[44] O'Neill, 33.
[45] UN Security Council Resolution 242 was enacted after the Six-Day War and was aimed at bringing peace to the Middle East. It basically called for the withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the conflict, acknowledgement of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area. Resolution 338 was enacted after the October War of 1973 and reaffirmed Resolution 242 and the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

stalemate he faced. He restored Arab pride and thus set the stage for a negotiated settlement that

would return most of the territory lost in the 1967 War. He also set the stage for an eventual peace

treaty that would reduce his country's economic burdens. Sadat understood the interests of the

countries he dealt with and therefore was able to play on those interests to achieve his own. In

going to war, Sadat achieved his primary political objective of securing his power base. Facing

long odds, Sadat displayed the art of the possible through the masterful execution of his statecraft.

> **Rare is the statesman who at the beginning of a war has so clear a perception of its political objective; rarer still is a war fought to lay the basis for moderation in its aftermath.**
> **Henry Kissinger, "Why We Were Surprised"**

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[46] Abukhalil, The Middle East, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Chapter 2, Congressional Quarterly, Ninth Edition (Washington, D. C., 1999), 44.

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